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POLITICAL GROUPINGS

LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

Kazak political groupings may be considered from the point of view first of local administration and second of larger units. The local political group was normally the aul, and consisted, as said above, of an uru in its functional sense of related family groups living and migrating together, plus individuals such as hired workers, slaves and relatives on the maternal side who belonged by birth to other uru but resided among the first. The larger units which may be called "tribes" consisted of rather loose and constantly shifting confederations of local groups and should not be confused with the term "tribe" as sometimes applied to the more inclusive genealogical strata. Closely related uru might be found in different and hostile tribal confederations.

Local administration lay in the hands of officials, or rather more accurately, outstanding individuals, known as bij and aqsaqal. It is difficult to distinguish accurately in practice between these two dignitaries; my informants tended to use the terms interchangeably. Strictly speaking the bij was a judge who administered the customary law, while the aqsaqal was the director and administrator of the economic life of the group. He supervised the occupancy of grazing lands and chose the routes and dates for migrations. Bij is sometimes confused with another title, bek or beg, which, according to my informants, was a general honorary term applied to rich powerful men, the owners of large herds.[1] Aqsaqal, meaning literally "white beard," is said by Begaliev and Gavrílov[2] to be used as "oldest in the gens," "elder," as well as "overseer," the sense in which I employ it. The process of the extension of its meaning here is obvious. Tlenshiev said bek might be synonomous with aqsaqal.

My informants also classed the molda[3] as an administrative official. To him were referred cases involving the shariat, or Moslem law, in distinction to those covered by the old common law.[4]

There are faint suggestions of a religious function having formerly appertained to the aqsaqal in his capacity of being in theory, if not actually, the oldest of the uru. Zaleskie[5] mentions "certain ceremonies and prayers" which he recited on the occasion of marriages, and Levshin[6] reports that before setting off on a war or raiding expedition the "chief

[1] See Lansdell, *Russian Central Asia*, 310, who says that in the south bek is used instead of bij. Begaliev and Gavrílov distinguish between the two, defining bij as "judge" and bek as "feudal lord" or "prince" (*Kazakśko-Russkíi Slovar'*, 43, 46).

[2] *Kazakśko-Russkíi Slovar'*, 27.

[3] "Mullah," Mohammedan priest, teacher, learned man.

[4] Arabic: adat; Kazak: zan.

[5] *La Vie des steppes*, 24.

[6] *Déscription des hordes*, 373–74.

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624 of the tribe" recited prayers and sacrificed a white horse which was afterwards eaten. This reference to the priestly function of the chief and the prominence of the horse in ceremonial observances will be noted later in connection with Mongol material. 1

There was no regular process or order for assuring the succession to the offices of bij and aqsaqal. An incumbent would normally hold office during life or as long as he were able to maintain his authority. Radlov has admirably summed up the status of the bij in saying[7] that authority was concentrated in individuals who were distinguished by reason of wealth, ability, sense of justice and numerous relatives, who could, if necessary, support words with deeds through their henchmen. He adds significantly: "Da das Nomadvolk keine Wahl des Häuptlings kennt, so ist die Bi-Gewalt gewöhnlich eine Machtsusurpation der betreffenden Persönlichkeit und nur selten eine allgemein unbedingt anerkannte."

Radlov's statement summarizes the views of my informants, who said that when the bij died he might perhaps be succeeded by his son, but this was not necessarily the case. It might be by any powerful man who "would appoint himself and say 'I am bij'." (Here the informant was using bij and aqsaqal interchangeably.) In any given group it appeared that the successor to office would probably be chosen from among themselves by the five or six wealthiest and most influential members of the aul, who would normally be relatives of one another and heads of the principal family lines of the uru predominating in the aul membership. Meyendorff[8] notes that the office tended to become hereditary but he who was not able to retain it by merit soon lost it. After the Russian occupation local officials were elected subject to government supervision and approval, which may be the source of Czaplicka's statement[9] that the Kazak "clan head" is elected.

[623] It should be noted, however, that Pallas[10] refers to a "democratic council" which chose one of its members as war leader when planning a military excursion; Levshin[11] mentions assemblies of "relatives, friends and neighbors" called to discuss local questions, which might break up in a wrangle. It is difficult to estimate the nature and scope of these councils and assemblies but I shall revert to the question presently.

Within the uru-aul group relations between the bij and aqsaqal on the one hand and the people on the other were apparently more personal than strictly political or governmental. In discussing the nature of economic social groupings we have observed the patron-client relationship between the wealthy herd owners and their poorer kinsmen and dependents. It is difficult to distinguish clearly between economic and political ties and obligations. [554] The bij and aqsaqal were usually themselves the largest herd-owners of the aul, or representatives of them as a class. The basic economic and political groups coincided.

[7] *Aus Sibirien*, 1: 513–14.
[8] *Voyage d'Orenbourg*, 47.
[9] *Turks of Central Asia*, 49.
[10] *Voyages*, 1: 622–23.
[11] *Description des hordes*, 397.

1 [See cat. 116, pp. 78-79 -- Analyst]